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Senate

The Senate met at 2 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable CRAIG THOMAS, a Senator from the State of Wyoming.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chaplain will lead us in prayer. Today, we are pleased to have with us as guest Chaplain, Rabbi Arnold E. Resnicoff, U.S. Navy retired.

PRAYER

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Almighty God of freedom, who gave us the promise and the dream of liberty to be proclaimed throughout the land, we pause before this session to recall words spoken by a Senate nominee—Abe Lincoln—on this day, June 16, in 1858. “A nation divided against itself cannot stand,” he said, and we “cannot endure half slave, half free.”

O Lord our God and God of generations past, we offer thanks for all the progress we have made since that historic speech, even as we recognize we still have more to do. Slavery, the institution, is no more. But let us unite in our resolve that none should be enslaved by prejudice or hatred that threatens the humanity and dignity we have fought to recognize and guarantee; that none, victimized by ignorance or discrimination, live lives half slave, half free.

Grant us and all our leaders the wisdom to debate and disagree, with civility and respect, the issues of the day. But give us, we pray, the wisdom and the faith we need to safeguard a nation united, not divided—indivisible, as we pledge—in our pursuit of liberty and justice for us all.

And may we say, Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable CRAIG THOMAS, a Senator from the State of Wyoming, led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Repub-

lic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. STEVENS).

The assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,

Washington, DC, Monday, June 16, 2003.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable CRAIG THOMAS, a Senator from the State of Wyoming, to perform the duties of the Chair.

TED STEVENS,
President pro tempore.

Mr. THOMAS thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

SCHEDULE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, today the Senate will begin consideration of S. 1, a prescription drug benefits bill, for debate only. There will be no votes during today's session. Today is an excellent opportunity for Senators to deliver their opening statements. We encourage all Senators to participate in this debate. Hopefully, Members will take the next day or two and deliver their opening remarks. The next vote will occur during Tuesday's session of the Senate and Members will be notified when that vote is scheduled.

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS AS PART OF MEDICARE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I will make a very brief opening statement and then our friend and colleague from Nebraska, Senator HAGEL, who has been extremely active and has a very innovative proposal to deliver prescription drugs to our seniors, is going

to take over for this side for the remainder of the afternoon.

This is indeed a historic debate. “Historic debate” is a term perhaps over used in the Senate but that is not the case today. Today, after almost 40 years from Medicare's creation, we begin debate on legislation to help our most frail citizens acquire the miraculous but expensive prescription drugs they need.

For decades, we have witnessed the ever-expanding power of innovative pharmaceutical drugs both to cure and to treat. For decades, we have talked about providing our seniors, the poor and fragile of our society, the financial aid and means to acquire those wonder drugs. For years, colleagues on both sides of the aisle have talked of the need. Today, the talk ends and the action begins.

What begins today will be completed this year. There are many reasons but none greater than the leadership of one man, George W. Bush. He is the reason we are at this point in the Senate today. It is President Bush who has made the commitment, shown the leadership, and challenged the Congress to act that has made this day possible. Yet President Bush's Medicare effort, like that of past Presidents, might have been for naught except for the leadership of Dr. BILL FRIST. As a doctor and reformer in the 1997 Medicare Commission and now as Senate majority leader, he is uniquely qualified to make a difference, and a difference he has made in that his decisive leadership has resulted in this bill, S. 1, which we have before us today and will have before us for the next 2 weeks, if that is what it takes to get final action.

Other prescription drug bills have been before the Senate, but this is the first time the Senate considers a bill actually reported out of the Finance Committee with an overwhelming bipartisan vote. That is truly unprecedented and a further tribute to Dr. FRIST.

● This “bullet” symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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